

14 and 15 year-Old School License and Instruction Permit Holders Crash and Conviction Comparison

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Since May of 1998, the Department of Transportation's Office of Driver Services staff has been conducting a systematic study of school license holders by the number and age of license holders each month in order to study issuance and age patterns. In 1999 Iowa's Graduated Driver License law took effect. Young people who wished to get a school license had to take driver's education and be crash and conviction free for six months before they could obtain a school license effectively preventing issuance until at least 14 ½ years of age. The results of that study in conjunction with population demographics, traffic violation rates and traffic crash rates show that 14 ½ to 16 year old school license holders are 6.5 times more likely to receive a moving violation conviction and 11.5 times more likely to be involved in a traffic crash than 14 ½ to 16 year-old instruction permit holders.

Historical Perspective

The school license was created by the Iowa legislature in 1931 to allow 14 to 18 year old students to drive to and from school for the purposes of attending classroom instruction. It was originally designed for farm children whose farm chores made it difficult to use other means of transportation to get to school and back to the farm. When the law went into effect there were only 650,000 motor vehicles registered in the state compared to nearly 3.4 million today.

Today's Demographics

The Department ran a study of the number of school license holders by rural and urban counties to see if the demographics of today's school license holder matched the original intent of the legislation. Researchers divided the state into two groups; the 25 most urban, most populous and highest crash counties, and the remaining 74 mostly rural counties. The findings were that:

- Urban counties hold 66.2% of the states population.
- Urban counties have 68% of the state's traffic crashes.
- In 2000, over 45% of the school license holders reside in these most urban counties.
- In 2006, nearly 50% of school license holders resided in these most urban counties.

With increasing numbers of school license holders driving to school and school-related functions in the larger communities, it can be assumed that half of the school license holders are using the license in settings and in contexts not intended when the law was created.

Moving Traffic Violations and Traffic Crashes

Driver License, school license and permit holders, aged 14-19 (a six year group), see a far larger percentage of drivers required to attend the Driver Improvement Program (for three or more moving violations or one violation for speeding 25 mph over the speed limit violation) than any of the ten-year age groups of older drivers. Traffic conviction rates begin to drop in the twenty to twenty nine year-old age group and are at their lowest rate in the late forties to mid-fifties.

An abiding observation of traffic safety statistical analysis is that the younger the driver's age group, the higher the number of traffic crashes and moving violation convictions, with one exception being the performance of 14 and 15 year-old instruction permit holders. These permit holders are required to drive under the supervision of parents or older responsible adults, unlike their school license counterparts who often drive by themselves or with peers.

Being supervised by an adult is one of the basic reasons why instruction permit holders have a far lower traffic conviction and traffic crash rate than young people who are allowed to drive by themselves or even young adults who can drive without supervision. School license holders, even though the vast majority (92-97%) hold the license for less than a year (average length 4.5 months), have moving violation conviction and traffic crash rates that are far higher than instruction permit holders of the same age.

A Comparison of Crash & Conviction Experience of School License & Instruction Permit Holder

Age	Instruction Permit Holders					School License Holders				
	Number of Licenses	With Crashes	Crash Rate*	With Moving Violations	Violation Rate*	Number of Licenses	With Crashes	Crash Rate*	With Moving Violations	Violation Rate*
14.5-14.9	10,686	14	13.10	13	12.17	411	0	0.00	0	0.00
15.0-15.4	11,372	20	17.59	27	23.74	2498	37	148.12	21	84.07
15.5-15.9	11,529	23	19.95	44	38.16	4634	110	237.38	101	217.95
Total	33,587	57	16.97	84	25.01	7543	147	194.88	122	161.74

Instruction Permit Holder

Crash Rate*	Violation Rate*
16.97	25.01

School License Holder

Crash Rate*	Violation Rate*
194.88	161.74

* Crash and Conviction Rates are calculated per 10,000 licensed drivers.

School license holders are **11.5 times more likely to be involved in a crash** than instruction permit holders.

School license holders are **6.5 times more likely to receive a moving traffic violation conviction** than instruction permit holders.

Summary

According to an August 2006 Iowa Department of Transportation study, a school license holder is 11.5 times more likely to be involved in a traffic crash and 6.5 times more likely to receive a moving traffic conviction than an instruction permit holder of the same age (age 14 ½ to 16). The difference in traffic crash rates, moving traffic conviction rates indicate that 14 and 15 year olds do not yet possess all the driving skills and decision-making capabilities that are needed for driving without adult supervision with today's more complex driving demands. Recent psychology studies in brain development indicate that the section of the brain used to assess risk has not matured by age 14, indeed the studies indicate that area of the brain is not fully developed until age 25 or even later in most young people.

The Iowa Department of Transportation has been conducting this study annually since 1996. The numbers may change from year to year. However, the essential findings, that school license holders are far more likely to be involved in a crash or convicted for a moving traffic violation, have not changed since the first survey. This year's finding of 11.5 times greater chance of being in a crash for school license holders is the largest difference in risk yet recorded in this survey.

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